Which Way Is Up

Time marched on, and even though the sadistic thoughts were subsiding, adolescence created a whole new set of challenges. It was also time to learn to drive. I bet I was the ONLY kid in the state to start out on 2 wheels, then 3 wheels before driving a real car. Dear dad always had an eye for an automotive challenge, and the Sunday swap meet did not disappoint! My first set of wheels was a Lambretta scooter. It was of Italian descent, with a front panel or 'skirt' step through for your legs. We got along all right except on rainy days which prompted one episode I curse to this day. As I pulled up to the intersection waiting for the light to change, I was in the far-right lane. The pavement sloped towards the gutter, just enough to throw me off balance and I dumped it. I was wearing a dress that day and thus became an amusing vision as I scrambled up off the curb, chasing the damn scooter; still in gear as it careened on its side along the gutter. I grabbed the kill switch to stop the 300 lb. beast. Motorists watching the show came over and helped me pull the dang thing upright, get it started and send me on my way.

The next mode of transportation was a Cushman 3-wheeled mail cart, which made me stand out more than the scooter did; especially after it was painted a bright lime green. It was a box on wheels. I sat on a bucket seat that tilted back to reveal the engine compartment. There were sliding doors on either side of the driver, and a back door that opened into a fair-sized compartment; big enough to hold a couple of friends. It barely went over 40 mph, but I became instantly "cool". Mom provided a large, latch-hooked yarn pillow in shades of brown, red and blue. It became known as the "blue-eyed, wounded wooly mammoth." The inside walls were painted in bright primary color swirls of Peter Max designs. On the side were the words," Big Bright Green Pleasure Machine." A gold eagle finial was added last.

My earlier gregarious nature began to reappear. So much so that during my senior year I was occasionally seen strutting the halls in a Marine dress uniform jacket, and old slightly squished beaver top hat with braided hatband. (A nod to Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band).

Inside had Peter Max designs and a "wounded, blue-eyed wooley mammoth" pillow.

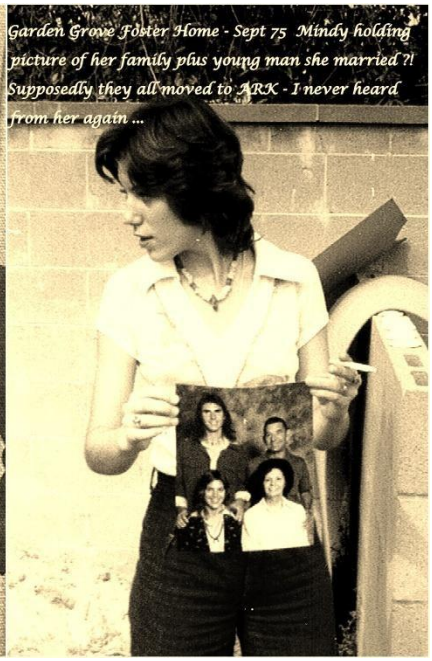
The coveted fourth wheel arrived in the form of a late model VW bug. It was painted the same lime green, with hand painted red pin-stripping by 'Gormo.'

Next on the adolescent hit parade were hormones. Mom thought the 'birds and bees' talk would upset me, so the extent of my education consisted of an Ann Landers pamphlet about sex; handed to me while I sat in the back seat of the family car. That suited me fine. There was not much that mom could say that would have convinced me that men and sex could be a good thing. But what to do with all those chemical conflicts that brought acne, Kotex and irritably? Play gay!

Yep, I dabbled with the idea of lesbianism. I joined my high school G.R.A. (Girls Recreation Assoc.) I was not the sporting type, so I became scorekeeper for the softball and basketball games instead. It was a relief to have other girls to talk to, escaping the drama of a boyfriend and dating. I became embroiled with a click of girls that were not marriageable material.

Two girls I was closest too – Patty and Mindy – created plenty of drama within our circle of friends. Patty was using my good girl reputation as cover for her drug and alcohol abuse. When I became too clingy, she abruptly gave me the cold shoulder for an entire summer. I was lost.

Mom had seen this depression before, and she did her best that summer to get me involved in an art program with the Riverside Community College. She helped me a lot.


Garden Grove Foster Home - Sept 75 Mindy holding picture of her family plus young man she married ?! Supposedly they all moved to ARK - I never heard from her again ...

My other close gay friend, Mindy, was a year behind me in school. I had little opportunity to hang out with her because her parents decided to disown her. The Mormon church looked poorly on anything other than the missionary position between a man and a woman. So, Mindy's parents choose the church over their daughter. Mindy was put into a foster home over 60 miles away. For over a year Mindy was an outcast from her mother and father. I tried to visit her when I could. The last time I saw her, she showed me a family photo of herself, her parents, and a tall young man she was engaged to marry! I was speechless! I knew what she was doing. She wanted a child and to be accepted back into her family. This guy was apparently a willing patsy. I later learned Mindy divorced him after a year. When her parents moved to Arkansas, I assume she went with them. I never heard from her again. I miss her.

Alone again, with no idea what to do after graduation, I decided to face my demons. I was seduced by an older man one afternoon after school. He took me aside and told me I could make a good deal of money, and he could provide me with a place to stay. You would think with my prior impression of men, I would flee the thought of it. But I didn't - I signed up with the Air Force.

So, with my shocked parents' approval, I signed on the dotted line with an Air Force recruiter. It was 1973 and the Woman's Equal Rights movement was gaining a louder political voice. Ironically, the Air Force required an 8 x 10 glossy photo of women applying for entry. I don't suppose the men had to look pretty to be shipped off to Vietnam.

After making this decision, I enjoyed the last 6 months of my senior year at Ramona High School. My friends in G.R.A. were dumbfounded, I would do such a thing. Yet, before I left for basic training at least 5 other G.R.A. members joined various branches of the military - including Patty.

Little did I realize at the time, but I was being driven by the grit of unknown ancestors. More than the fiery red/gold hair I inherited from the likes of Logan, McKelvey and Grant; my being drawn to the military was not a precedent. Those skeletons were yet to emerge.